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SUBJECT: ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS IN IRAQ: THE POSITIVE
ENERGY OF IRAQ'S CIVIL SOCIETY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Government of Iraq's lead anti-corruption agency, the Commission of Integrity (COI), works with NGOs and civil society (hereafter referred to as NGOs) to enforce ethical behavior in the public and private sectors. A number of NGOs have demonstrated their commitment to fight corruption and many would like to have funding to do anti-corruption programs. NGO representatives agree there is a need for a national strategy and coordination among the NGOs and that corruption is pervasive in society. They also concur that a preventive strategy, teaching children early in their schooling about transparency and integrity, is essential for change. There seems to be no shortage of groups calling themselves NGOs, but no real control on the legitimacy or efficacy of these groups. Most have some political, religious, social, business, or media connections. Iraqi NGOs have the potential to make a lasting difference in the fight against corruption. The Anti-Corruption Coordination Office (ACCO) plans to hold a conference to promote coordination between NGOs and government officials on anti-corruption efforts. END SUMMARY.

The Commission of Integrity Work with NGOs

¶2. (SBU) The lead GOI anti-corruption agency, the Commission on Integrity (COI), has a Director General level officer, Mr. Samir, who works directly with NGOs. Mr. Samir told us the COI, under authority of CPA Order 55 that created the COI, has worked with various NGOs since its inception in ¶2004. He has a select list of around 50 "cleared" organizations he trusts with which he normally works (he will share the list with us), though he cautioned that these organizations also have numerous sub-branches and groups, especially in the provinces, on which the COI has no information. Samir noted not all NGOs are active or honest. The COI provides training to these groups in all provinces except those in the Kurdistan Region. Samir said COI Commissioner Judge Raheem Al-Ugaili supports this work and has asked him to expand his activities. Samir is in the final stages of forming a CSO Alliance for Integrity and Fighting Corruption, a core group of 27 NGOs, that will be open to others to join, centering their activities on fighting corruption.

NGOs Interested in Anti-Corruption Projects

¶3. (SBU) At a lunch the ACCO hosted for a number of NGOs, NGO representatives noted a major concern was how pervasive corruption is throughout society, citing administrative and financial corruption and the impact of corruption on services. There was universal agreement that a generational change was essential and key to such change would be to teach children about transparency, accountability, and integrity early in their educational development. One participant spoke of the need for a joint government/NGO strategic work plan to combat corruption. In separate follow-on meetings

with some of the more active NGOs, ACCO discovered there has been activity by some in the field of anti-corruption.

¶4. (SBU) Some of the larger, more well organized and funded NGOs have had a number of programs or are planning new programs that touch on anti-corruption issues. For example, the Al-Noor Universal Foundation, established in 2003, has worked on numerous anti-corruption related programs with international implementers, e.g., conducting anti-corruption workshops for NGO leaders and creating posters and banners with anti-corruption themes. Among the new programs they propose is a project to educate Iraqi government employees on existing anti-corruption institutions and mechanisms for fighting corruption. They would like to hold workshops to increase the awareness of corruption concerns among youth. Al-Noor also proposes to establish a National Committee to Fight Corruption, with members to be selected from representatives of the media, academia, the arts, women, other NGOs, politicians, the private sector, religious leaders, social leaders, and youth. Also on Al-Noor's agenda are public outreach campaigns and training of provincial officials. The Iraqi Green Peace Organization proposes a project to educate teachers and, in addition, students in grades four and five, in an effort to reach out early for the children to learn about anti-corruption ideals. This proposal fits in with the ongoing coordination between the Commission of Integrity Education Department and the Education Ministry on development of a new anti-corruption curriculum for all school levels.

¶5. (SBU) The Media Center for Iraqi Civil Society Organizations would like to start up a website to serve as a

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repository for documents and publicize anti-corruption related documents covering visions and opinions, news and activities, and projects and programs. The services would include translation and search engine capability. A representative from the Democratic Center for Women's Rehabilitation would like to see the NGOs organize subcommittees from NGOs, media, etc., to be incorporated into a national strategy to produce recommendations on fighting corruption and how to implement those recommendations and then create a national strategy based on the best of those recommendations.

Some Concerns about the NGOs

¶6. (SBU) One NGO representative asserted that NGO coordination in Iraq is lacking. She expressed the deep need for Iraqi NGOs to make their own decisions and not to follow international directions. The NGOs, she added, need to focus on their purpose, justification, and sustainability and monitor anti-corruption activities. There is concern about the current draft NGO law and fear it will make it much too difficult for NGOs to operate. (NOTE: The Embassy is working closely with the Parliament's Civil Society Committee to amend the draft NGO law to bring it into compliance with international best practices. End note.) All agree on the need for accountability and transparency in government and the importance of giving Iraqi citizens the key role in monitoring and reforming society.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: There is a long tradition of NGOs in Iraq, both in the public and private sectors, although changes are taking place within these organizations in the post-conflict environment. There seems to be no shortage of groups calling themselves NGOs, but no real control on the legitimacy or efficacy of these groups. Most have some political, religious, social, or media connections. Others are hitched to business interests and register an NGO foundation with the Iraqi authorities to give them a special umbrella to cover their other activities. Still others are

groups formed to get funding from international sources for their worthy causes of the day. Judging from our contacts with the NGO community, they are well aware of the corruption going on throughout the country and have numerous ideas of how to combat this corruption. Unfortunately NGOs themselves are, in a number of cases, under suspicion for corrupt practices, receiving funding and not being able to account for how the money is spent. However, despite concerns, there are a number of active, effective, honest NGOs, and some NGOs have already been involved in anti-corruption activities. Opportunities exist for international donors to collaborate with NGOs on anti-corruption projects, providing mentoring and oversight. Iraqi NGOs have the potential to make a lasting difference in the fight against corruption. The ACCO plans to hold a conference to promote coordination between NGOs and government officials. END COMMENT.

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